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NEWS

Winchester Town Meeting kicks off with financial articles, Ledges tabled again

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

April 29, 2025 . 12:24 AM — 8 min read

Night one of Town Meeting kicks off at Winchester High School with the Scouts posting the flags.
WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

The first night of the annual Spring Town Meeting kicked off Mo
night, with new Town Moderator Philip Frattaroli at the helm — a

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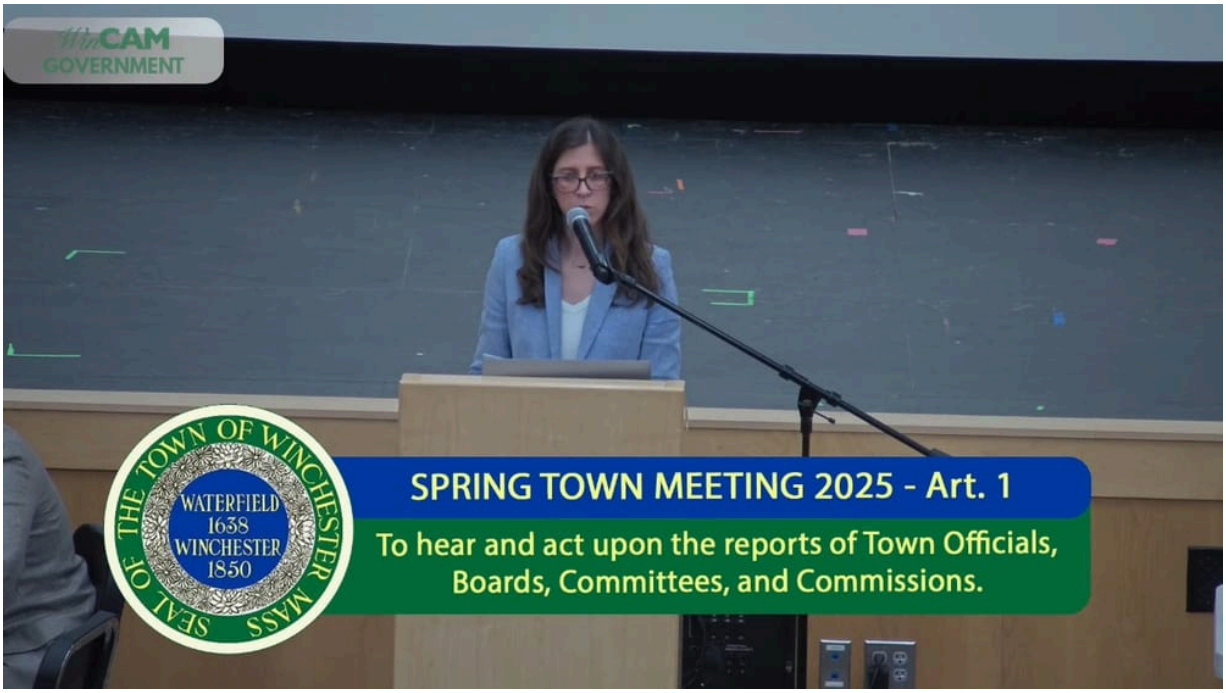
problematic projector that brought on more than one joke from officials delivering committee reports.

“Anyone have this on their Bingo card?” Frattaroli kidded, as the issue continued for the first hour of the meeting, disrupting planned presentations.

Despite the loss of slides, officials managed to bring Town Meeting members up-to-date on projects that have been completed since the body met in November 2024 and what they can expect over the next three sessions.

With 56 articles on the spring warrant, speakers mainly focused comments on the town’s continuing financial issues.



Town Manager Beth Rudolph delivers her report on Winchester’s ongoing fiscal issues. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Select Board Chair Michelle Prior, Finance Committee Chair Jeff Calabrese and Town Manager Beth Rudolph each addressed the fiscal year 2026 budgetary deficit and current plans to bridge the gap. The trio st

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challenges facing the town will continue beyond the current budget as officials look for solutions.

“FY26 has been a very challenging budget year,” Rudolph said, adding the town has had to dip into its reserves to solve this year’s deficit.

Rudolph added it’s not the first time the town has used reserve funds to solve fiscal problems. She said the town has been working to cut costs, especially in the areas of health and dental insurance, where a 19% increase earlier this year took officials by surprise.

Rudolph and Prior both said Winchester will probably be looking at an override next year.

“2019 was our last override,” Rudolph said. “We expected to use the funds over two or three years, but we have stretched that over six fiscal years.”

She added that as the structural deficit facing Winchester continues, there will come a time when the current strategies are no longer sustainable.

To that end, Prior said the Select Board is putting together a State of the Town Committee to form a comprehensive fiscal plan. The committee is expected to be made of up of the entire Select Board, two School Committee members, one Planning Board member, two Finance Committee members, one Capital Planning Committee member, Rudolph, Town Comptroller Stacie Ward, Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett, Director of Finance and Operations Andrew Marron and two or three residents to be appointed by the Select Board.

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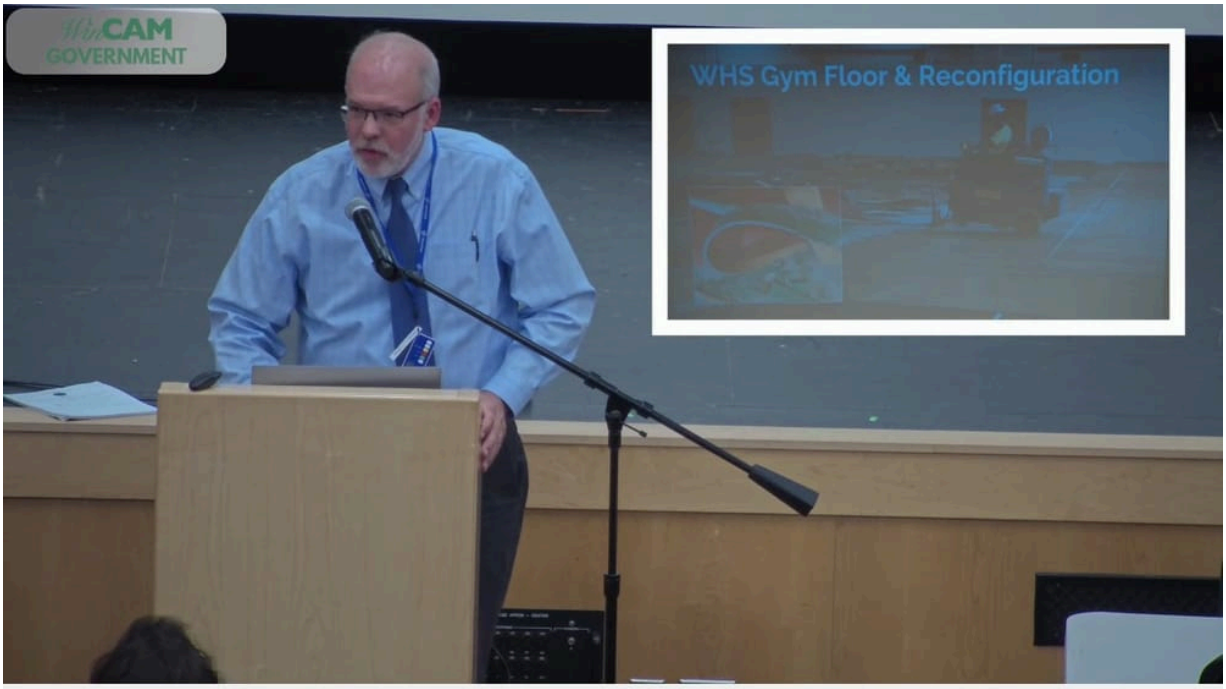

EFPBC Vice Chair Chris Nixon brings Town Meeting up-to-date on the gym project at Winchester High School. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

School Committee Vice Chair Tim Matthews and Educational Facilities Planning and Building Committee (EFPBC) Vice Chair Chris Nixon also addressed financial issues facing the schools, such as the upcoming Article 28, which requests $400,000 to pilot an elementary literacy program, as well as more money for the fixing of concrete issues at Winchester High School and the upgrade of the gymnasium.

Those articles are expected in upcoming Town Meeting sessions.

Financial articles

Nearly $480,000 was transferred from Free Cash to cover various items in the fiscal budget, such as snow and ice removal, health insurance and unemployment compensation. Town Meeting unanimously passed all five motions contained within Article 10.

Additionally, all 10 motions within the Capital Planning Committee (CPC)-sponsored Article 16 were unanimously passed. The article trans nearly $1.8 million for capital projects, including $50,000 for a Depa

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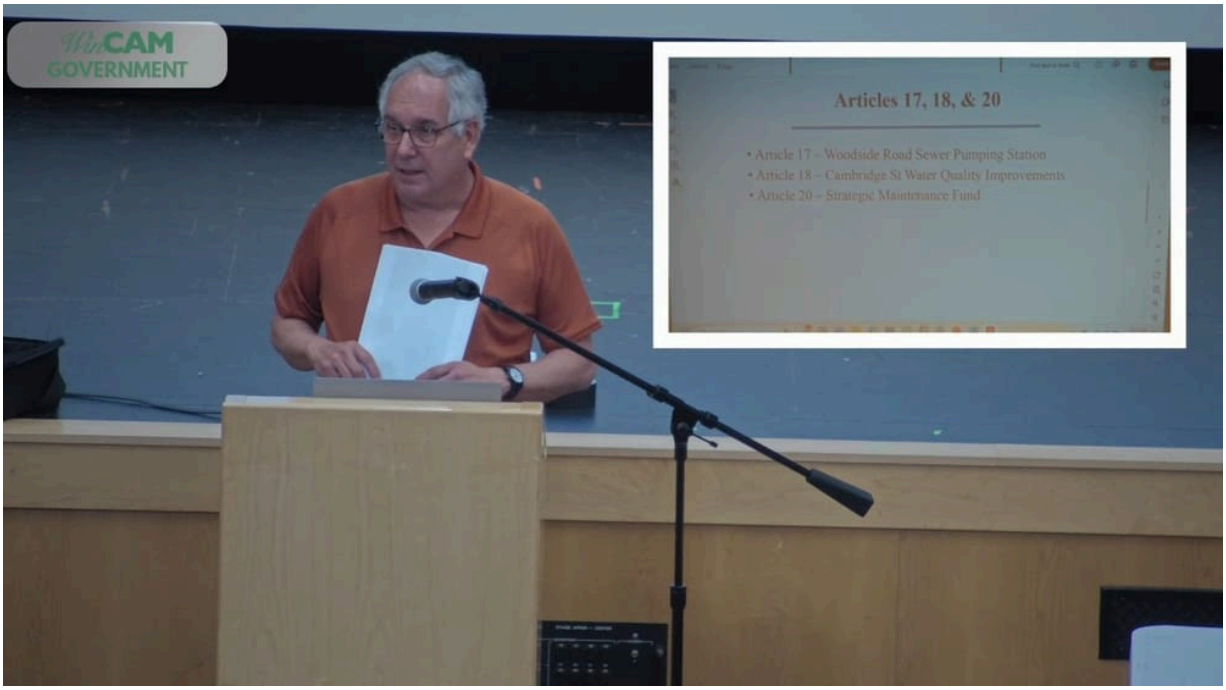
of Public Works brush cutter, $500,000 for road and sidewalk updates and $102,000 for digitization of Building Department and Zoning Board of Appeals records.

Articles 17 and 18, which asked for $1.5 million to remodel and repair the Woodside Road Pumping Station and $800,000 make improvements to the water system on Cambridge Street and the surrounding area, were also passed.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GOVERNMENT
Articles 17, 18, & 20
• Article 17 – Woodside Road Sewer Pumping Station
• Article 18 – Cambridge St Water Quality Improvements
• Article 20 – Strategic Maintenance Fund

CPC Chair Roger McPeek discusses Articles 17, 18 and 20 at Town Meeting. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

And Article 20, an annual request since 2015 to add $100,000 to the Strategic Capital Maintenance Fund, was also unanimously passed.

CPC Chair Roger McPeek said the Select Board, CPC and town manager all agreed to raise this year's request to $200,000 due to the FY26 challenges.

After a question about the accounting of the money, Ward said the total in the account over 10 years has added up to $1.1 million, of which more than $800,000 had been spent on maintenance issues.

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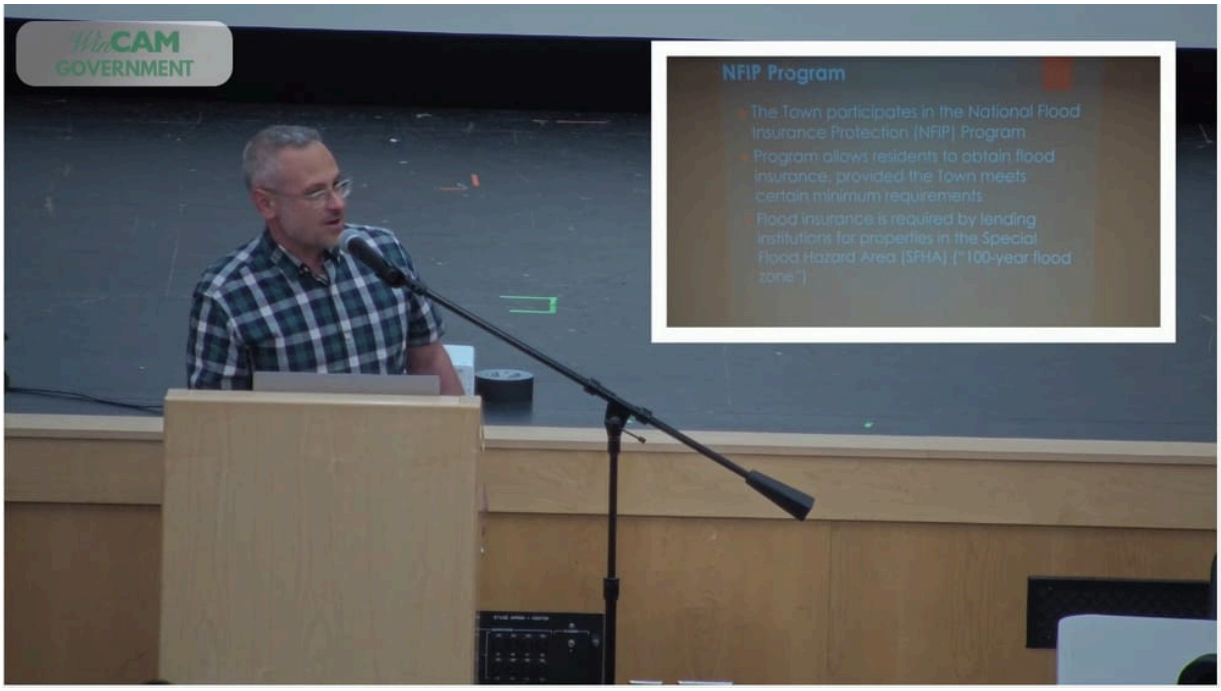
Ward added the fund allows Rudolph to take out money without going through Town Meeting for every request.

What also passed...

Article 3 — the Planning Board's report — was accepted. Chair Brian Vernaglia said both the MBTA 3A Overlay District and Main Street Mixed-use District have been approved by the state, although the Accessory Dwelling Unit bylaw revisions are still pending in the Attorney General's Office.

Vernaglia said after three big bylaw changes last year, the Planning Board has hit the pause button and would have no big articles at this Spring Town Meeting.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NFIP Program
The Town participates in the National Flood Insurance Protection (NFIP) Program
Program allows residents to obtain flood insurance, provided the Town meets certain minimum requirements
Flood insurance is required by lending institutions for properties in the Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) ("100-year flood zone")

Town Engineer Matt Shuman reports on updates needed by Town Meeting to the Floodplain Overlay District. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Article 4, which amends language to Section 8.1 of the zoning bylaw called the Floodplain Overlay District (FPOD) and Section 10 definitions, also passed.

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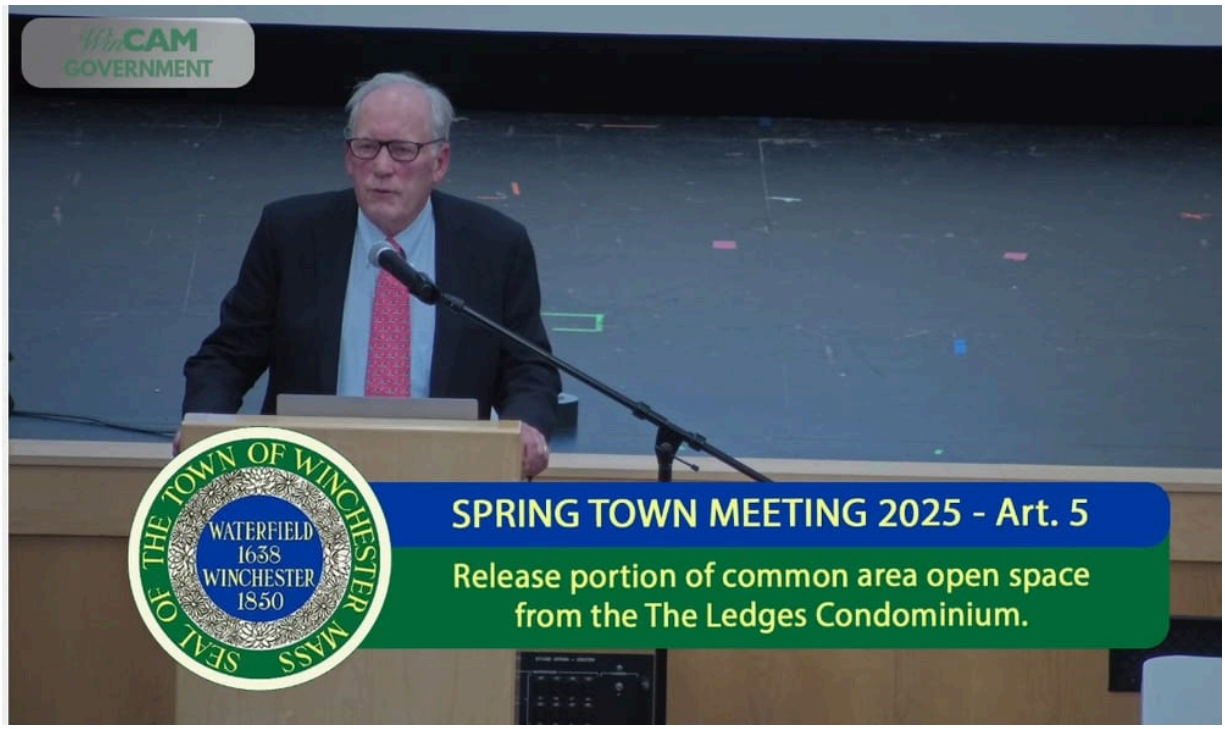
Town Engineer Matt Shuman said the language ensures continued compliance with FEMA regulations by aligning with the updated Massachusetts Floodplain Model Bylaw. The updated maps go into effect July 8, 2025.

What didn't...

The two articles — 5 and 6 — dealing with a request by The Ledges Condominiums to rezone a piece of land in order to sell it were once again on the outs.



The Ledges resident Richard Bartels spoke to Town Meeting about the difficulties he has had in bringing both Articles 5 and 6 before the body. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Frattaroli said Article 5 was being tabled until it could be further studied.

Precinct 8 member Diab Jerius questioned the legislative process.

Frattaroli explained that under Robert's Rules of Order, the matter can be referred for further study and brought up at another Town Meeti
debate.

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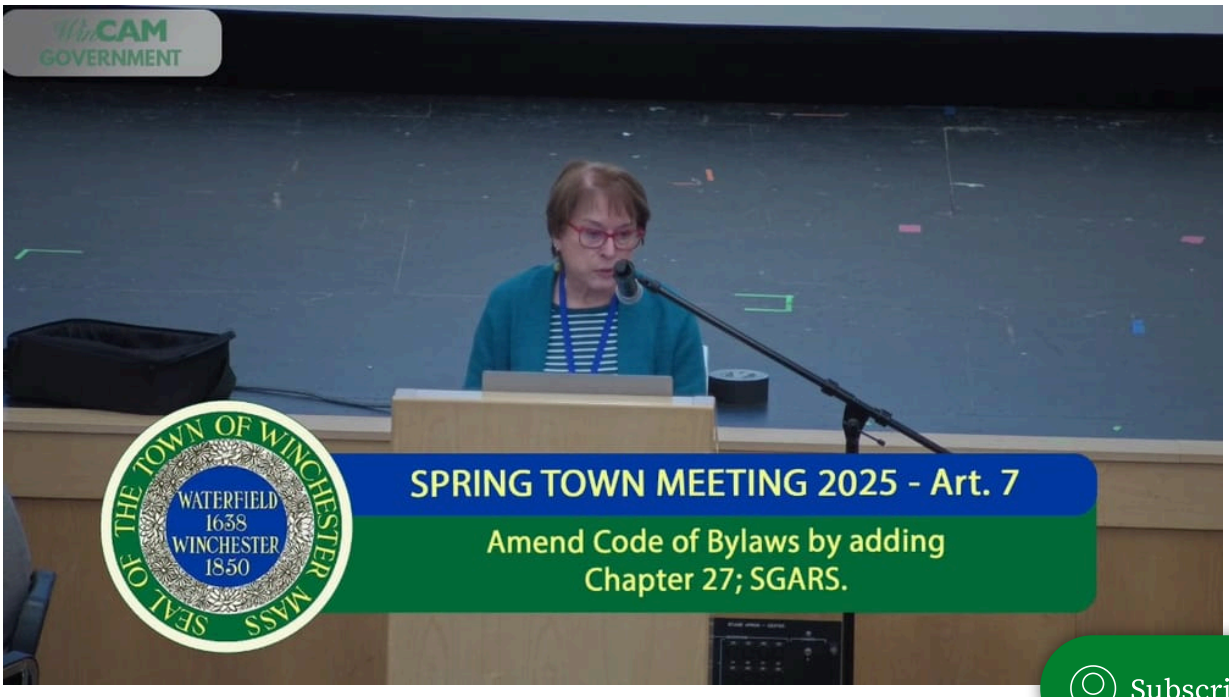
Article 6, Frattaroli added, could not be taken up by Town Meeting because it involved zoning. Zoning articles are prohibited from coming back to Town Meeting for two years.

The Planning Board debated whether or not Article 6 could be discussed during a meeting on April 15.

“It’s been suggested because the applicant didn’t seek a motion, there was no unfavorable action. Our opinion is to the contrary,” Town Counsel Jay Talerman said during the meeting. “There’s no such thing as removing something from a warrant. It could be removed beforehand, but once it’s on the warrant, it’s fair game and available for action. Any other person at Town Meeting could submit a motion on it.

“Precedent recognized by courts and common sense indicate if there’s anything other than positive action, it’s negative action,” Talerman added. “No action is treated as unfavorable action. An article not acted on fails. If you don’t move it, it fails. We looked up and down to see if there’s any leeway, but failure to take action is treated as unfavorable action.”



Cathy Velone said she would indefinitely postpone her article at Town Meeting until she sees w
with the Health Department budget item to deal with the issue. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

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Also indefinitely postponed was Article 7, a citizen's petition by Cathy Velone, to "amend the Code of Bylaws by adding Chapter 27, to eliminate the use of Second-Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARS)" on town property.

Velone said after submitting her article, the Health Department put forth a budget item to study alternatives to SGARS. Because of this, she said she would hold off on hers.

Article 19, which will ask Town Meeting to vote an more money to "pay costs to install additional culverts behind the Muraco Elementary School for flood mitigation purposes," has been postponed as the second to last article on the spring agenda.

Town reports

Megan Blackwell, co-chair of the Committee on Government Regulations, said Town Meeting could expect a glut of bylaw changes this session.

The 10-year review of the town's bylaws has finished and a report was submitted to the town in March.

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Get ready for a glut of bylaw changes, Megan Blackwell, co-chair of the Committee on Government Regulations, warned Town Meeting. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Blackwell said 24 of the town's 25 bylaws were reviewed, with the exclusion of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) since it was passed by the town just last November. She added there had been 22 public hearings and 10 boards and committees had seen the proposed changes.

Town counsel, Blackwell said, has also gone over the changes.

And speaking of the CPA, the new Community Preservation Committee's chair, David Miller, said the work to get the board up and running is going well. He said for FY26, Winchester has $1.6 million in the bank. The town is expected to receive a state match next year because the bylaw has to be in operation for at least a year before state funds arrive.

Right now, Miller said his committee is working through its practical processes of operation and hopes to have a presentation for Fall 2026 Town Meeting, as well as a list of possible applications.

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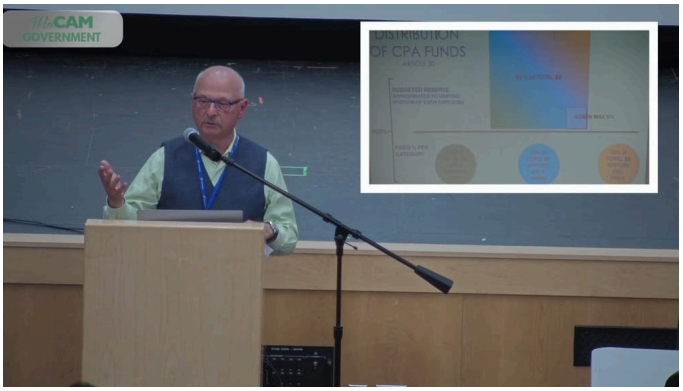

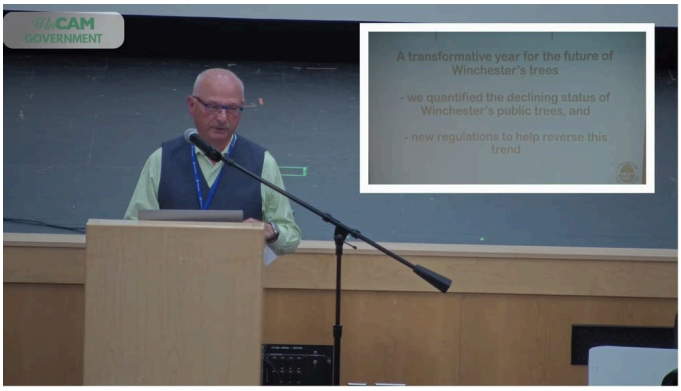
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GOVERNMENT
A transformative year for the future of Winchester's trees
- we quantified the declining status of Winchester's public trees, and
- new regulations to help reverse this trend

David Miller did double duty as chair of both the Community Preservation Committee and the Permanent Street Tree Committee during the first session of Town Meeting. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTOS/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

Miller also presented the Permanent Street Tree Committee's report, being that group's chair as well. He said a Tree Canopy Analysis was done and the findings showed that from 2012 to 2023, Winchester had lost a significant proportion of its trees.

He added the committee is working with the Select Board to add the planting of trees to the town budget, as well as perform a tree inventory every three years.

In his report, McPeek thanked Meg White and Mark Twogood, projects manager and assistant town manager, respectively, for all they do to help the board with its work.

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New Town Moderator Philip Frattaroli, right, helms the first session of Spring Town Meeting, along with Town Clerk MaryEllen Marshall. WINCHESTER NEWS/WINCAM PHOTO/NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY

He also spoke about James "Jimmy" Johnson, a long-time CPC member and fixture in Winchester government, who died earlier this month.

"Jimmy was a leader, a mentor and a friend," McPeek said. "Our projects span this town and Jimmy spanned this town. We are all better off for the effort he put into this town."

Both Johnson and Charles Nuremburger, a Town Meeting member who also passed away, were remembered with a moment of silence at the beginning of the evening.

Town Meeting is expected to resume on Thursday, May 1 at Winchester High School, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Frattaroli said on the agenda will be bylaws.

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Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

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NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

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March 4, 2026

NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

March 3, 2026

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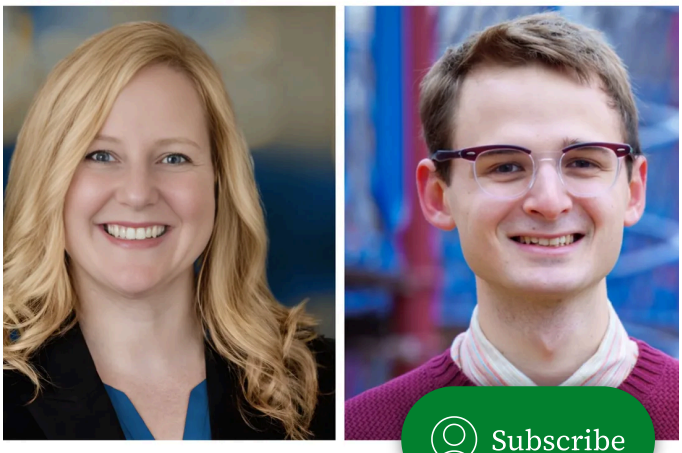

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Celebrate Women's History Month with Girls Leading Change

The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

March 4, 2026

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

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March 4, 2026

FEATURES

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

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